

PAUL’S PERSPECTIVE ON SOTERIOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN FAITH

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ABSTRACT

Salvation is an important concept in the Christian Faith. Everything about Christianity centres on Salvation because it is through salvation that an unbeliever becomes a believer. Several scholars have written extensively on soteriology, offering their perspectives and thoughts on the topic. There is an ongoing prevailing heresy on salvation, which is “once saved, forever saved.” The question that arises: Is salvation a once-and-for-all event? Can Salvation be lost? Are there stages of Salvation? This paper uses historical and descriptive methods to discuss Paul’s perspective on soteriology and its impact on the contemporary Christian Faith. A comparison was made between the Wesleyan view of salvation and Paul’s view, which shows a strong similarity. It was discovered that salvation can be lost; it is not a once and for matter. A deliberate effort has to be made by believers to maintain their relationship with God. Believers are expected to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

KEYWORDS: Apostle Paul, New Testament, Soteriology, and Christian Faith.

INTRODUCTION

Salvation is an imperative concept not only in the religious and theological circles but also in the Christian faith. The concept of Salvation can be found throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, the word salvation can be found in different contexts in its various sections. The same applies also to the New Testament. Bogdalczyk notes that *salvus* is the Latin meaning of Salvation and it could also mean “healthy, untouched, saved, salvaged, unspoiled, undamaged, or preserved in its entirety. It connotes healing in the holistic sense such as “to heal from disease, demonic possession, enslavement through sin, and the ultimate power of death over man, as well as being free from fear of death, senselessness, guilt, and loss of self” (31).

This paper historically and biblically investigates the various processes of salvation. It discusses the meaning of salvation, salvation in the Old Testament, the ancient perspective of some church fathers on Salvation, Salvation in the Gospel, Paul’s Perspective on Salvation, and Paul’s use of tense(s) for Salvation. The perspective of once saved, forever saved is not a balanced one. It is full of deception and confusion. It

gives the believer room to think Christ has paid the price for the believer, and there is no need for constant sanctification, concentration, holiness, dedication, and commitment to the service of God. Can we continue in sin that grace may abide? The answer is no! Although salvation and sanctification in some contexts are used interchangeably, salvation is never once and for all; it can be lost if the believer is careless or backslides. Salvation is instantaneous, progressive, and ultimate. Christians are admonished not to play with their salvation but to ensure that a righteous and holy life is lived continually in order to enjoy the presence of God and fellowship with him, which is very important to the Christian faith. A lost relationship with God is a loss of one's salvation.

THE MEANING OF SALVATION

Buthlezi, in his thesis, gave some Hebrew and Greek words which are closely connected to salvation they are Nasal, Malat, Palat, Gaal, Hayah, Yasa, Soteria, and Sozo. These words signify to rescue, deliver, redeem, ransom, God's grace and providence, and purchase out (31-36). Areas connected to the Salvation experience (*ordo salutis*) are sanctification, sealing, indwelling, reconciliation, regeneration, justification, redemption, faith, conviction, election, etc. God is the source of Salvation because it was in his agenda from the creation. God brought salvation to the world through his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with the price he paid on the cross Genesis 3:15, Psalm 18:2, Isaiah 45:22, 49:6, 62:11, John 3:16, Acts 4:12, Ephesians 1:4-8, Revelation 7:10 (Estes 1).

Fatokun gives a general definition of salvation as "the state of being saved; preservation or deliverance from destruction, ruin, loss, or harm." (15). Salvation connotes God's act of mercy to forgive the sin of a sinner, which leads to reconciliation to God and also God's preserving man from visible and invisible dangers (16).

Salvation in the Old Testament

Salvation in the Old Testament is focused on God as the deliverer. Salvation as used by the Israelites has a wider usage, such as the prevention of termination of life, safety from all forms of dangers, freedom from captivity, and overcoming a battle (Psalm 6:4, 2 Samuel 3:10, Exo. 15:2, etc.). Examples of God's act of Salvation in the Old Testament are the deliverance God gave to Noah, his family, and animals through the Ark, the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and God giving victory over battles to the Children of Israel. Salvation can be experienced globally and individually. Many individuals in the Old Testament at one point or another experienced God's salvation and deliverance. Examples are David, Hannah, Daniel, and the three wise men. David gave instances of different occasions God delivered him from evil and saved him, etc. Salvation is also viewed in terms of redemption and the provision of

God. Just as he provided water from the rock for the Children of Israel in the wilderness and manna from heaven (Fatokun 16-22).

Primitive Patriarchs' Perspective on Salvation

Origen of Alexandria, a prominent primitive Church father, is generally known as the Universalist. He believed and indicated that supernatural fire is the means that has to cleanse the soul of a sinner before salvation can be attained. He ascertains that an accurate understanding of God is enough to eliminate all unrighteousness and lack of knowledge from the soul of man. The Bishop of Hippo, known as Saint Augustine, posits that everyone is committing sin unintentionally and there is no amount of sin that cannot be pardoned by God. He affirms that the cleansing processes of the gathering of the saints can assist in purifying man and obtaining salvation. It is the Spirit of God that helps one to comprehend and attain God's provision for salvation. Another church father, Athanasius of Alexandria, believes that God is with humanity because of Christ, and it is through Jesus Christ that all can be saved. He fought for the divinity of Jesus because it is only through Jesus that man can be saved (Banda 2).

During the reformation period, there were two prominent scholars who spoke on salvation, and their views are prominent in our contemporary time. John Calvin propounded TULIP. *Total Depravity* is the death of the spirit man as a result of sin. *Unconditional Election* is that some have been chosen by God to be saved, and while some have been chosen to be damned. *Limited Atonement* means the atonement for Christ, which comes as a result of his sacrifice on the cross, is for those who are chosen by God to be saved. *Irresistible Grace* connotes that God himself gives his grace to anyone to whom the gospel is preached to accept the salvation message and be saved. The grace overcomes any form of inner or external resistance to accept the gospel. *Perseverance of Faith* means that those whom God has elected and saved cannot lose their salvation again. This is the source of the doctrine once saved forever saved (<https://thinkingonscripture.com>).

On the other hand, John Wesley, who was a great evangelist and revivalist, gave his own perspective on the same issue propounded by his contemporary Calvin. For Wesley, *Total Depravity* is human beings as a result of sin; they are unable to live righteously, but through the grace of God, they can be saved. *Conditional Election* means that God has given everyone the grace to repent and be saved. Everyone who desires to be saved is given the grace to respond to Christ's salvation. *Unlimited Atonement* explains that the outcome of Christ's atonement is open to all who believe. *Resistible Grace* connotes the grace of God that can be accessed by anyone who desires and can be accepted or rejected. *Assurance and Security* of salvation are present for everyone who maintains a consistent relationship with God and who does not depart from the Christian faith (<https://www.crivoice.org/tulip.html>).

Salvation in the New Testament

Youvan gives a theological foundation of Salvation and writes that the concept of salvation lies at the heart of Christian theology, a theme woven intricately throughout the tapestry of biblical narrative and doctrinal development. In the biblical context, salvation is multifaceted, encompassing deliverance from sin, reconciliation with God, and the promise of eternal life. The New Testament, in particular, offers a rich exploration of this theme, with varying emphases presented by different authors. The teachings of Jesus, the Pauline epistles, and other New Testament writings provide a complex yet coherent picture of what salvation entails and how it is attained. In the Gospels, Jesus presents salvation primarily in terms of the Kingdom of God, emphasizing a transformative relationship with God and a reoriented life that reflects God's will and purpose. For Jesus, salvation is inextricably linked to repentance (Mark 1:15), a theme that is vividly illustrated in parables such as the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The Johannine literature, particularly the Gospel of John, emphasizes belief in Jesus as the Son of God as the pathway to salvation (John 3:16-17). The Pauline epistles, especially Romans and Galatians, delve deeper into the mechanics of salvation, presenting it as a result of grace through faith. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith (Romans 5:1) became a cornerstone of later theological reflection. He argues that salvation is a gift from God, not something that can be earned through human effort (Ephesians 2:8-9), yet he also recognizes the vital role of works as a fruit of faith (Galatians 5:6) (3).

Salvation in the Gospel

Matthew from the beginning indicated that the manifestation of Jesus was to save his people (Israel) from their sins. Jesus indicated that his presence in the world was for the benefit of those who were lost, that they might be saved. Jesus at the last supper indicates that his blood would be poured out for the forgiveness of sin Matthew 9:2-13. Matthew projects salvation as physical and spiritual, and final salvation, which talks of salvation in the future. Matthew 19:25. Luke states that the purpose of the coming of the Son of man was to bring salvation. He refers to the spiritual salvation which comes by the preaching of God's word, Luke 8:12. The major focus was to save the lost sheep by bringing salvation to the lost (Luke 19:10). John shows that Christ's physical presence on earth was to bring salvation to humanity. Believing and accepting the salvation brings eternal life, while rejecting and refusing the salvation leads to judgment and eternal damnation (John 3:16-17, 36) (Green, McKnight and Marshall 721-3). M'bwangi affirms that some scholars have written to support or oppose the motion that the Gentiles are included in the salvation perspective of Matthew for the Jews (2).

Paul's Perspective

Salvation has a different meaning depending on how it is used. A person can be saved from disaster, cured from sicknesses and diseases, and have a safe and sound

journey, etc. God's guidance and preservation of his children from evil is another context salvation is used in the first section of the Bible. Salvation is used for freedom from sin and a cure from sickness in the Gospel. What matters most in Pauline epistles is the freedom from sin and its repercussions. Paul talks about salvation in different ways, as shown in the table below

S/N	Greek word	Meaning	Number of times used
1.	<i>Sozo</i>	To save	29 times
2.	<i>Soter</i>	Savior	12 times
3.	<i>Soteria</i>	Salvation	18times
4.	<i>Soterios</i>	Ringing salvation	1 time
5.	<i>Rhuomai</i>	To rescue	11 times (858)

From some of Jesus' miracles, it shows that salvation has a lot to do with the physical aspect of the person, as he indicates, "your faith has made you free." Paul sees salvation as a work accomplished by Jesus. This is the major reason God sent his son, for the salvation of men. The word salvation signifies God's salvation to man through his son in delivering them from their sinful state. The father and son worked hand in hand to bring salvation to humanity. This is evidenced in the word "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). The origin of salvation is God, and the reality of salvation was fulfilled by Christ's sacrifice. The indignation of God as a result of sin can be avoided through salvation, according to Paul, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and Romans 5:9. Those who live in sin cannot be friends of God, but the sacrifices Jesus made on the cross reunite man back to God for those who believe and accept Christ. It is the death and resurrection of Christ that brings a complete turnaround in the lives of the believer. It is only those who believe in and accept the salvation of the Lord that will be saved (Hawthorne, Martin and Reid 859).

PAUL'S USE OF TENSE(S) FOR SALVATION

Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid write on Paul's use of tenses for salvation. Paul speaks of salvation in the past, present, and future. Paul shows in his writing that God is the originator of salvation. The price for everyone to be saved has been paid by God through Christ. The NIV Bible is used in this work.

Salvation in the Past Tense

Aorist Tense- *Titus 3:2* He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:24: For in this hope, we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what we already have?

Perfect Tense

Ephesians 2:5-10: Made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression -it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up in Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ In order that in the coming age, he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.⁹ not by works so that no man can boast.¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 3:5: This was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

Colossians 1:13: For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

Salvation in the Present Tense

Romans 1:16-17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed- a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous shall live by faith."

Romans 10:10: For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Romans 7:24-25: What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!...

2 Corinthians 2:15: For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

2 Corinthians 6:2: For he says, "In the time of my favour, I heard you, and in the day of salvation, I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

Salvation in the Future Tense

Romans 11:26, 1 Corinthians 5:5, Philippians 3:20, Romans 13:11, 1 Cor. 3:15, 2 Thess. 2:10, 2 Tim 4:18, Rom 5:9, 13, Col 1:3

Romans 5:9: Since we have now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from God's wrath through him.

Romans 11:26: And in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

Romans 13:11: And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for us to take up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

1 Corinthians 3:15: If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though as escaping through the flames.

1 Corinthians 5:5: Hand this man over unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his Spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

Philippians 3:20: But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we early await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:10: and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and to be saved.

2 Timothy 4:18: The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Colossians 1:13: For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his son, he loves (Hawthorne, Martin and Reid 860).

ITS IMPACT ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Salvation can never be achieved by man himself. There are vessels and human means God uses to bring salvation to people. Paul's view is that a man can release himself to be used by God to bring salvation to others. A believer can preach the gospel to the unsaved and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the person could repent and be saved. It is only God through Christ that can make a person be saved. Paul gave two illustrations in Romans 11:14 and 1 Corinthians 7:16. These two passages convey the message that God can use anyone as a vessel and medium to preach to the sinner. The believer's style is enough to save an unbeliever, as revealed in the second scripture. Secondly, as revealed in 1 Timothy 4:16, abiding in the teachings of God's word is another way a person can be transformed, as Paul advised Timothy. Abiding in the sound teachings of God's salvation would bring salvation to Timothy and his audience (Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid 859).

Paul reveals in Romans 9:27 that the salvation of God, which is opened to everyone, is not meant for everyone but for a few chosen ones, whom he calls the remnant. The people of the world do not take the things of God seriously, but those to whom the prophets have declared to be God's children will be saved. Paul, who is an apostle of the Gentiles, desires that his teachings and preaching would save both Gentiles and some of the Jews. Paul sees it as a responsibility to reach out to everyone he comes across. Romans 11:13-14, 1 Thessalonians 2:16, 1 Corinthians 9:22. Those

who believe in the saving grace of Jesus are those who will be saved. Salvation does not come through works, but a believer should show that he is saved by the works and fruit he bears, Philippians 2:12 (Hawthorne, Martin and Reid 860).

Today, there are many people who have come to the knowledge of the truth because someone preached to them, and they believed. This led to their salvation. God is willing to forgive any sinner, no matter how deeply the person has gone into sin. As long as the sinner is ready to repent, he shall be saved. On the other hand, God is willing to use as many people as possible to transform the lives of many and to bring them into his kingdom as long as they are ready to be used by God. Romans 10:13-15: For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written; How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

The proclamation of the gospel has led to the spread and emanation of several denominations. TEKAN, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Catholic, etc. All profess they are followers of Jesus. Preaching salvation to many that they might be saved. Some denominations have deviated from the teaching of Jesus, which is Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. This is the central message of the Kingdom. Believers and Religious institutions should go back to their first love, and they should ensure they preach the true salvation message and not denominational doctrines so that many can be saved from the kingdom of darkness and be translated into the Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined various views on salvation, such as the meaning of salvation in the Old Testament, salvation from a patriarchal perspective, salvation in the Gospels, and in Pauline epistles. Mayhu concludes in his work, *Sanctification, the Biblical Basis* that the words salvation, sanctification, perfection, or completion are used interchangeably in the Bible. Both salvation and sanctification are connected and interwoven (148). A critical comparison of Paul's perspective of salvation and the Arminian (Wesleyan) view of salvation is similar and connected. If salvation is instantaneous, progressive, and ultimate, according to Paul's observation, it means that salvation can be lost if care is not taken. The Bible says, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" Philippians 2:12. Therefore, it is evident that Calvin's perspective of salvation is misleading and heretical, and it is capable of leading many away from faith under the pretence of assumption. Many believers have been strongly influenced by this Calvin view to their damnation because they no longer strive to live a holy and righteous life before God. They live their life anyhow because they believe that once

they are saved, they are forever saved, and this is the deception of the Devil. Believers and biblical scholars should always preach and uphold the truth in God's Word so that the unsaved can receive the salvation of God. They should strive to maintain their relationship with God in holiness, righteousness, and truth with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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